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SUBJECT: RIGHT-WING LIEBERMAN UNABASHEDLY ADVOCATES
TRANSFER OF ISRAELI ARABS

1. (SBU) Summary: Right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu party leader Avigdor Lieberman told the Ambassador January 31 that separation of Israeli Jews from Israeli Arabs is necessary in order to promote Israeli security and maintain Israel's Jewish identity. To accomplish this, Lieberman proposes that Israel redraw its border with the West Bank through negotiations to place some Israeli-Arab population centers that are close to the Green Line within Palestinian territory, and to include some Israeli settlement blocs within Israel. He also would require that all Israelis -- Jews and Arabs -- take an oath of loyalty to the state or lose their citizenship. Lieberman expressed concern that support for Hamas is growing among Israeli Arabs and asserted that most Israeli-Arab Muslims are not loyal to the State of Israel. What he termed a "coalition" between Hamas, Hizballah, Iran, and Syria presents a dangerous prospect for the region's future, Lieberman asserted. End summary.

Lieberman Fears Dangerous Coalition in Region

2. (SBU) The Ambassador met the leader of the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu ("Israel, Our Home") party, Avigdor Lieberman, January 31 in Lieberman's modest Jerusalem office at Lieberman's request. Lieberman emphasized that he seeks what he termed creative solutions to Israel's problems, arguing that the "traditional" approaches, including the Oslo Accords, did not work. Israel is now in a worse security situation than prior to the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Lieberman asserted, and is threatened by a "coalition" between Iran, Syria, Hizballah, and Hamas. Lieberman expressed concern over the instability in the region and the damage done by corruption in the Palestinian Authority (PA). He characterized PA President Mahmud Abbas as "very weak," and predicted that Hamas will "use" Abbas as a fig leaf of legitimacy for two-to-three years and then "throw him out." The Ambassador said that Arafat had left a lasting negative impact on the evolution of Palestinian society.

3. (SBU) Lieberman predicted that Hamas would only grow stronger in two-to-three years, and he characterized Hamas as disciplined, with a track record of delivering services, and less corrupt than Fatah. The Ambassador said that Hamas may not be able to deliver on the national level, especially if there are cuts in international assistance. Lieberman asserted that, in this case, Iran will become more active in assisting Hamas, including through oil subsidies. The Ambassador noted that while Iran may be able to help Hamas financially, it could not actually deliver services to the Palestinians, such as electricity, water, and fuel. The Ambassador emphasized USG concern over Iran and its nuclear program.

Hamas and Israeli Arabs

4. (SBU) Lieberman said that he now worries about the influence of Hamas in Israel. "Within two years," Lieberman said, "Hamas will take over" the Israeli-Arab population. He characterized Sheikh Raed Salah, a leader of the Northern Islamic Movement that rejects Israeli-Arab participation in the government, as Israel's version of a Hamas leader. Lieberman asserted that the only reason most Israeli Arabs want to remain in Israel is to receive their social benefits. Lieberman said that the Druze, a sect of Arab Muslims who have a history of loyalty to Israel and who perform mandatory military duty, are, by contrast, loyal citizens. He questioned the loyalty of Israeli Arabs who define themselves as "Palestinian." The Ambassador made mention of Lieberman's campaign for better law enforcement, and suggested that effective law enforcement in Arab communities could prevent strong-arm tactics by extremist elements, give political space to moderates, and help win Israeli-Arab loyalty to the state. The Ambassador also suggested that providing quality education to the Israeli-Arab sector could encourage moderate views in that community.

Only Solution is Separation

15. (SBU) Lieberman underlined his view that to avoid conflict, a separation of Israeli Jews from Israeli Arabs must occur. He said his proposal for such a separation is based on the Cyprus model, where, he said, the island's Turks are separated territorially from the island's Greeks. Lieberman said that the roadmap makes a mistake by advocating a two-state solution, wherein Israel retains two peoples within its borders, Jewish and Arab, while the Palestinian state retains only Palestinians. Lieberman asserted that states that are composed of different "nations" continue to experience conflict. The Ambassador noted that the United States maintains its diversity without experiencing such conflict. He also pointed out that the roadmap does not specify borders, which would be subject to negotiation by the parties.

16. (SBU) Lieberman said that under his proposal, Israel would negotiate a shift in its borders with the West Bank to place Israeli-Arab population centers, such as the city of Umm el-Fahm, in the Palestinian territories, and some Jewish settlement blocs near the Green Line within Israel. (Note: Lieberman did not indicate what would happen to Jewish settlements, such as Ariel, located deeper within the West Bank. End note.) Lieberman claimed he has had meetings with Palestinian leaders and that they expressed willingness to consider this type of land swap. In response to the Ambassador's query, Lieberman said that the actual border would be the result of negotiations with Egypt, Jordan, and the PA. He said that the plan would also require the endorsement of the U.S. and at least one other member of the Quartet. His proposal would "not be a unilateral move," but one negotiated with "several partners." He added that Egypt should also be a part of the solution by providing some of its territory to Gaza, which Lieberman described as too densely populated. Jordan needs to be involved, Lieberman said, asserting that the Hashemite Kingdom will be directly threatened by the rise of Hamas. Asked if his plan was to negotiate with Hamas, Lieberman said negotiations could take place with Abbas, since Abbas would remain as head of the PA.

17. (SBU) Asked about the status of Israeli Arabs living throughout Israel and in mixed cities, Lieberman acknowledged that this is "more complicated." He advocated that all Israelis be required to take a loyalty oath, and that those who refuse be stripped of their citizenship. Lieberman emphasized that under his proposal, Israeli Jews would also be subjected to the same requirement. Lieberman said that some ultra-Orthodox religious Jews who do not accept Zionism may have a problem with such an oath. He also said his proposal would also require that ultra-Orthodox Jews who decline to serve in the military sign up for alternative national service. Lieberman asserted that "very few" Muslim Arabs -- except for the Bedouin in the North -- would sign a loyalty oath.

Election Prospects

8 (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's query, Lieberman said he would consider it a "great success" if Yisrael Beiteinu receives anywhere from nine to 11 seats in the March 28 elections. He questioned whether the Kadima Party has a real identity, since it is composed of some Likud and some Labor members. "Everyone feels we're going in the wrong direction now," Lieberman claimed. "We need radical changes," he asserted. If not, he said, "we are heading for big troubles."

Bio note

19. (SBU) Lieberman's office is manned by several young, Russian-speaking staffers. Lieberman, a 46-year-old immigrant from Moldova, was dressed in a suit and tie -- unlike most Israeli politicians -- and appeared confident and friendly -- quick to smile and joke. Lieberman is a strong nationalist and settlement supporter who lives in the West Bank settlement of Nokdim with his wife and three children. Lieberman is not currently an MK.

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